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Inscriptions and the later history of the theatre

Charlotte Roueché

As Joyce Reynolds has shown above, inscriptions record several stages in the building history of the theatre, up until the early 3rd c. Thereafter they provide almost no evidence on this subject; but, by contrast, they are an exceptionally rich source of evidence for the uses to which the building was put, both in the Roman and in the late Roman period.

Building and repairs in the later period

A benefaction by Androcles

While there is physical evidence of repair and construction work in the theatre after the mid 3rd c.,¹ there is only one inscription which seems to relate to such work. A text along the edge of the theatre stage was partly cut and partly painted, so that only very little can be made out.² The only words which can be made out are εὐεργεσία, "benefaction", and a name, apparently Androcles. The word εὐεργεσία is found in 3 other inscriptions of this period at Aphrodisias;³ those are all verse inscriptions, honouring benefactors. I think it likely that this text was also in verse, and that the benefaction for which Androcles was being thanked was some sort of expenditure on the fabric of the theatre; but it is hard to say any more. The script might be 4th-c., although there is not very much of it to go on; and Androcles could be either a rich local citizen or a governor. The epigraphic evidence for building work in the theatre after the 3rd c. is therefore virtually non-existent.

A seat of honour for an imperial official?

There is, however, one significant piece of work which may be related to the evidence of the inscriptions. In the central *cuneus* there is a podium for a 'seat of honour', which seems to have been inserted into the block without much care.⁴ It makes a noticeable break in the smooth line of the seating, and the workmanship is far less careful than that of other alterations in the theatre. There are also two areas of special seating in the stadium, in the 2 central blocks of seating on the north and the south sides; but these are clearly in their original state, and integral to the construction. The rough work in the theatre strongly suggests a late date, and I have been tempted to associate it with historical developments at Aphrodisias.

A seat of honour of this kind, on the central axis of the theatre, was added, in the Roman or late-Roman period, in other theatres in Asia Minor, for example in the theatres at Tralles,⁵ Priene,⁶ Miletus,⁷ Termessos,⁸ Side,⁹ and Nysa.¹⁰ The additions to these theatres have been noted, but not discussed until recently. J.-C. Golvin has now suggested that the addition of such a 'loggia' should be associated with the adaptation of these theatres to serve as "théâtres-amphithéâtres" — that is, for the presentation of such amphitheatre spectacles as wild-beast hunts and gladiatorial combats — since a loggia, located at

¹ See above pp.38-39.

² ALA 15.

³ Ibid. nos. 36, 63, 88.

⁴ See K. T. Erim, "Il teatro di Afrodiasias," in Bernardi-Ferrero IV, 163.

⁵ See Humann, *AthMitt* 18 (1893) 406; Bernardi-Ferrero III, 110.

⁶ Bernardi-Ferrero III. 14.

⁷ F. Krauss, *Milet IV.1 Das Theater* (Berlin 1973) 81-82.

⁸ Bernardi-Ferrero IV (supra n.4).

⁹ A. M. Mansel, *Die Ruinen von Side* (Berlin 1963) 138.

¹⁰ Not yet published.

the axis, was a characteristic feature of the amphitheatre.¹¹ At Aphrodisias, however, the installation of the loggia appears to be separate from the work of converting the theatre for such shows.¹² Moreover, it is not clear that, in the context of a Greek city, such an adaptation would require an alteration of this kind. The wild beast hunts and gladiatorial contests in these cities were presented by the city's high priest of the imperial cult, as part of the celebrations of the festival of that cult. The high priest would therefore preside over this celebration, just as the priest of Aphrodite would preside over a contest in honour of Aphrodite. He was *primus inter pares*, and it seems likely that the seating provision made for other festivals would be equally suitable. Thus in the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens, where the semicircle of seats of honour for the leading officials of the city survives, with a special seat for the priest of Dionysus at the central point; this arrangement, which dates back to hellenistic times, continued, but in the Roman period a 'loggia' was inserted in the central block of seats, above and behind the seat of the priest.¹³ A similar addition, above a similar row of seats of honour, was made at Priene.¹⁴

This therefore suggests that the addition of a loggia reflects, not a new use for a theatre, but the presence of a new kind of official, whose rank was not simply higher, but different in kind from that of the civic officials and dignitaries in the 'seats of honour' — such as an imperial official, most probably a governor. These alterations should therefore be looked at in a historical context.

From inscriptions we now know that a new province, of Caria and Phrygia, was separated from the proconsular province of Asia in the middle of the 3rd c. The first clear evidence for this came from the current excavations at Aphrodisias; it has since been confirmed by further discoveries elsewhere, the most recent of which indicates that the separate province was already in existence in the reign of Decius (249-51).¹⁵ It remains uncertain, however, which city, in Caria or Phrygia, served as the capital of the joint province. When the province was further subdivided, in the early 4th c., into Caria and, eventually, 2 Phrygias, Aphrodisias certainly served as capital of Caria; and I have put forward some arguments for suggesting that it was already the capital of the joint province.¹⁶ I was tempted to include among those arguments a reference to the remodelling of the seat of honour in the theatre; but that work could just as well have been done for a governor of Caria as for a governor of Caria and Phrygia.

But I now see that, in fact, the presence of such a seat cannot even be associated with the function of a provincial capital. Of the cities listed above, Athens was a provincial capital from Roman times, and Aphrodisias and Perge became provincial capitals by the 4th c., but the other cities cited never achieved such status. On the other hand, Miletus, Side¹⁷ and Tralles¹⁸ all continued to assert the rank of 'metropolis' into the late Roman period. This does not undermine the argument that the addition of a loggia as intended for a governor, or another imperial official; but it might mean either that a city was already a centre for Roman imperial administration, or that it hoped to become one.¹⁹ This would be, therefore, further evidence yet for the intense competition between cities to attract the attention and the presence of the imperial authorities — a competition which continued from the 3rd c. well into the 5th c.

11 J.-C. Golvin, *L'amphithéâtre romain* (Paris 1988) 237 ff. He notes the conversions at Aphrodisias, Miletus, Termessos, and Priene, observing that this is just a sample, based on the publication of Bernardi Ferrero.

12 See above p.38..

13 See M. Maass, *Die Prohedrie des Dionysostheaters in Athen* (München 1972) 21, 60ff. and pls.I-II.

14 See above n.6.

15 The evidence was originally published in *JRS* 71 (1981) 103-20. Most of the texts there have been republished, and the new evidence considered, in *ALA* chapt.1. Further relevant material from the area of Keramos is shortly to be published by D. French and E. Varinlioglu.

16 *ALA* pp. 2-4.

17 See E. Bosch, "Die Inschriften" in A. M. Mansel *et al.*, *Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Side im Jahre 1947* (Ankara 1951) no.49, and no.29, with C. Foss, *ZPE* 26 (1977) 172-80; see also A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964) 883.

18 *LBW* 1652d, with *PRLE* 1 Caesarius 6.

19 See C. Roueché, "Floreat Perge" in *Images of authority* (ed. M. Mackenzie and C. Roueché) (Cambridge 1989) 206-28.

Thus at Aphrodisias, in the first half of the 3rd c., the city was inviting the proconsul of Asia, Sulpicius Priscus, to attend a sacrifice there, which may well have involved attending a festival, with celebrations in the theatre.²⁰ This seat, and those at other sites, could just as well have been installed for such a visit, to demonstrate that the city could accommodate such an official in appropriate splendour, as for a governor who had taken up residence in the city.

Most importantly, however, such an arrangement reflects the increasing involvement of imperial governors in what had been typical areas of civic activity. Just as, in the 4th c., the imperial government and its representatives appear as responsible for local building works, so also the governors seem to have played an increasingly important part in the celebration of festivals and shows. That the governor was expected to appear at public spectacles is indicated by Libanius, when he attacks Tisamenus (governor of Syria in 386) for abandoning more important duties in order to do so.²¹ But it is clear that governors also played an important part in ensuring that shows were put on, at a time when the civic funds for providing festivals and spectacles had been undermined by inflation, and local benefactors were under increasing pressure. Thus Tisamenus ordered the Council at Antioch to stage a wild-beast hunt, and, when they refused, arranged himself for a citizen of Beroea to stage one.²² It was just this kind of thing that the emperors had legislated in 372 to prevent, pointing out that governors had no legal right to the control of spectacles which had been put on and paid for by local money, and should not move them from one city to another.²³ They also tried to prevent governors from attending shows too often,²⁴ and from moving chariot teams from one city to another.²⁵

Such responsibilities for governors are referred to in 2 inscriptions at Aphrodisias, one of which was found in the theatre, each describing a governor as an *agonothetes*. This term was originally used of the man who was appointed to preside over and organise a contest; he would sometimes supplement the existing funds to provide additional items — further prizes, or an extra entertainment — from his own pocket.²⁶ Already in the Roman period, however, the term had come to suggest, not only providing extra items, but meeting some of the essential costs of a contest; and by the 4th c., *agonothetes* seems to mean the person responsible — in every sense — for putting on a contest. Thus, for example, a law of 385 dealt with the obligations of local citizens to act as *agonothetae* — and the suggestion is that many were unwilling.²⁷ Marcian's Novel 3, of 451, is concerned with protecting the possessions of cities — that is, their income-producing investments — among which he includes *agonotheticae possessiones* — the investments from whose income contests could be financed; and this novel is repeated in the Justinianic Code.²⁸ The two inscriptions at Aphrodisias describing governors as *agonothetae* are so far without parallel. One records honours for the governor Dulcitus, who should probably be dated to the middle or late 5th c.²⁹ The other is on a statue base, which was found fallen on the theatre's stage, honouring Vitianus, whose titles suggest that he was governor in the 6th c.; he is the latest datable governor of Caria so far attested at Aphrodisias.³⁰ The use of such terms provides yet another indication of how particularly tenaciously old civic traditions — or at least their terminology — continued at Aphrodisias; but it also confirms the increasing acknowledgment of the function in civic life of the imperial government, and its representatives. A law of 409 suggests that governors were not only expected to undertake such duties, but might do so with enthusiasm; it limits the expenditure by governors at festivals, saying that otherwise

20 A & R Doc.48.

21 Or. 33.8.

22 Or. 33.21-5, with W. Liebeschuetz, *Historia* 8 (1959) 113-26 (= id., *From Diocletian to the Arab conquest* [London 1990] XI, esp. 121).

23 CTh 15.5.1.

24 CTh 15.5.2 (386).

25 CTh 15.5.3. (409).

26 See for example IGR IV.1270, with L. Robert, *Mélanges Dussaud* (Paris 1939) 737 (= *Opera minora selecta* I, 609).

27 CTh 12.1.109.

28 Marc., Nov. 3, CJ 11.70.5.

29 ALA 40.

30 ALA 65.

they will ruin the resources of the cities.³¹ The implication seems to be that some governors were offering lavish prizes or donations at festivals out of the cities' own funds. It then exempts from these limits certain categories of presiding magistrates, including *agonothetae*; the sense is not entirely clear, but the implication would seem to be that the governors were in these cases acting within the framework of the civic institutions, and presiding at regular, pre-existing festivals, rather than organising extra shows out of civic funds. In the case of Dulcitius and Vitianus, there is of course no way of knowing whether they used their own money, imperial resources, or money from the city's own funds; but their titulature is an interesting example of the confusion and overlap which tended to take place between the functions of the governors and of prominent citizens. Such a situation was eventually acknowledged, at least in the case of Syria, by the formal transfer of the expenses of the most important festivals to imperial officials,³² and this legislation very probably reflects the situation elsewhere.

The political function of the theatre

In the competition between cities for pre-eminence, theatres and the spectacles presented there had always played an important rôle. The 3rd c. saw a substantial increase all over Asia Minor in the number and the scale of civic festivals: these included religious ceremonies and competitions both in sport and in stage entertainments. Audiences would be drawn from a wide area, and the presence of delegations from other cities was something to be celebrated.³³ This must be one of the considerations which lay behind the Aphrodisian decision to inscribe, on the north *parodos* wall of the theatre, a selection of the documents which recorded the city's special status.

The theatre, at Aphrodisias as elsewhere, was therefore much more than a place of entertainment. It served as a showplace of the importance of the city, to impress visitors from other cities; thus a characteristic privilege which a city might grant to a foreign citizen was the right to *proedria*, a front seat at spectacles. It also will have had a specific political use, for gatherings of the citizen body — both formal assemblies and impromptu meetings. There is no certain evidence for such use at Aphrodisias, but it is well documented at many other sites.³⁴ Not far away, in the theatre at Phrygian Hierapolis, inscriptions on the seats divide the *cavea* between the civic tribes; the citizens probably sat in tribes for public assemblies.³⁵ In the 1st c. A.D. the novelist Charito, who came from Aphrodisias, described as a matter of course how, when a crisis arose, citizens would assemble in the theatre of their city to consider it;³⁶ just such an impromptu gathering is described in the *Acts* of the Apostles: when the silversmiths of Ephesus held a meeting to protest at the activities of the apostle Paul, the citizens responded by going to the theatre.³⁷

In the later period, formal public assemblies became increasingly rare; at Aphrodisias, as at other cities, the formulae for erecting public honours last mention the people — the *demos* — as participating in the award of those honours in the late 4th c.³⁸ On the other hand, the presence of the governor's seat is a reminder that the theatre must now have had a new kind of political function, when the representatives of imperial authority met and addressed the people of the city, or — on the occasion of a meeting of the provincial assembly at their capital — of the province. Socrates, the ecclesiastical historian, describes such a gathering at Alexandria in 415, when the prefect published public ordinances to the people

31 CTh 15.9.2.

32 We know that this was done with the Olympic festival and the provincial festival at Antioch: CJ 1.36.1, of 465, with W. Liebeschuetz (supra n.22).

33 See the inscriptions at Aphrodisias honouring the cities which sent delegations to a new festival in the mid-3rd c.; CIG 2761-65, MAMA 8.451, with C. Roueché, JRS 71 (1981) 118.

34 See F. Kolb, *Agora und Theater, Volks und Festversammlung* (Arch. Forsch. 9, Berlin 1981) 88-99.

35 Published most recently by T. Ritti, *Hierapolis I: fonti litterarie ed epigrafiche* (Roma 1985) 118-22.

36 1.1.11, 3.4.17, 7.3.10.

37 Act.Ap.19.23-41.

38 ALA no.22.

assembled in the theatre; the occasion was called a *politeia*.³⁹ Such a use of theatres, coinciding with the increasing involvement of governors in public spectacles, helps to explain the increased blurring of the distinction between 'political' gatherings and gatherings for the purpose of entertainment, which is characteristic of the late-Roman period.

Entertainments

The primary purpose of the theatre, of course, had always been for the staging of contests within the framework of religious festivals, and of spectacles. Aphrodisias has produced a rich dossier of inscriptions illustrating its many festivals and contests in the Roman period;⁴⁰ and it is quite clear, from the inscription of Vitianus cited above, that such entertainments continued well into the 6th c. The excavation of the theatre has also uncovered abundant evidence for the entertainments presented there in the informal inscriptions on the stage and on the seats, which date, apparently, from all periods of its use.⁴¹

A graffito on the edge of the stage shows a tightrope walker — a reminder of the wide range of kinds of performance to be found in a theatre of the Roman or late-Roman period.⁴² Even more strikingly, a graffito on a seat shows a gladiator, with the inscription *Thrax*, Thracian, a term commonly used to denote a particular type of gladiator.⁴³ This complements the archaeological evidence which suggests that the theatre was remodelled to allow for the presentation of gladiatorial combats and wild-beast hunts, *venationes*, and supplements an already substantial and growing body of evidence from Aphrodisias for gladiatorial combats. The material previously known from Aphrodisias was presented by Louis Robert in his study of the adoption of the Roman custom of gladiatorial combats in the Greek cities of the east.⁴⁴ As he pointed out, such combats were first presented as part of the new festivals devised to honour the Roman emperors, which tended to include activities foreign to the standard hellenistic tradition.⁴⁵ This graffito can remind us, therefore, that the theatre was probably used for the celebration of festivals of the imperial cult — it was, perhaps, to such a festival that the governor Sulpicius Priscus was perhaps invited in the reign of Severus Alexander.

So the theatre was used for acrobatic performances, for gladiatorial combats and for *venationes*. But its primary function is still likely to have been that for which it was best suited — the presentation of some form of 'drama'. That it was so used is confirmed by the discovery of a most remarkable group of inscriptions — a group that is unparalleled elsewhere. This is a series of texts on the stage buildings of the theatre.⁴⁶ At the back of the stage there are 6 windowless chambers which open either onto the stage or onto the central entrance (fig.1). At the entrances of most of these rooms inscriptions survive — 12 in all — apparently reserving the rooms for various individuals. Those individuals, when they are further described, all seem to be mime performers: that is, performers of short plays, 'mimes', which came to be one of the most popular of all forms of stage entertainment in the Roman and Byzantine periods. The *pinakes* (wooden panels) of the Doric *proskēnion* (see above p.32) could naturally be changed to represent scenery suitable for mime performances. At some point, perhaps in the 3rd c. (although there is no evidence for the date), the *pinakes* were replaced by the construction of a brick wall between the columns, which was plastered and painted; traces remain of a simple decoration, with a trellis pattern below, and

³⁹ Socrates, *HE* 7.13.

⁴⁰ Many have already been published; the whole group is to be presented by J. Reynolds and myself as appendices 1-3 in C. Roueché, *Performers and partisans at Aphrodisias* (Journal of Roman Studies Monograph no.6, London forthcoming).

⁴¹ These texts are shortly to be published, together with those from the Odeion and Stadium, in Roueché *ibid.* chaps. 2-3 (stage) and 6 (seats).

⁴² Roueché *ibid.* 8.B.II.

⁴³ Roueché *ibid.* 46. H.9.I; cf. 46. H. 3 and 4.

⁴⁴ L. Robert, *Les gladiateurs de l'Orient grec* (Paris 1940).

⁴⁵ S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and power* (Cambridge 1984) 89.

⁴⁶ Roueché (*supra* n.40) 1.



Fig.1. The stage, looking north, showing backstage chambers at the right.



Fig.2. View of stage (1973), showing brick wall between columns of *proskenion*.

figures above (fig.2). This produced a permanent back wall to the stage pierced by 3 doorways, which was the standard layout required for most dramatic performances.

The backstage corridor thus had 3 entrances to the stage on the west side, and, on the east, access to the backstage rooms at whose entrances the texts mentioned above were inscribed. Of the 12 texts, 7 refer to the performer's διασκεύη, — in 3 cases this is given the further epithet ἄμαχα which I take to mean 'invincible'. The word διασκεύη, if it is to be taken with ἄμαχα, must therefore be a neuter plural of a singular διασκεύος, and the term is not otherwise attested in this gender; but the sense seems reasonably clear. The rooms are being reserved — as we might expect — for the performer's props. We know that these were important for mimes: at least one papyrus survives listing the props required for the performance of a particular mime show — labelled memorandum of the equipment for "Leukippe". They are listed by scene: "For the barber's shop: barbers' stuff, mirror, bandages, food, a belt-purse, a money box". Some of these things are no more than the ordinary props of any comedy, but some must have contributed to the splendour of the display: for another scene there are 'rays', for the sun.⁴⁷ Their importance is further emphasised in the inscriptions at Aphrodisias by describing them as 'invincible'.

These inscriptions, therefore, confirm what we would expect — that the theatre was used in the Roman and late-Roman period for mime performances. They include some useful information about the development of such performances, as well as providing at least one new word for the dictionaries. From internal evidence I believe them to date from the 3rd c. Doubtless the rooms were in regular use during the history of the theatre. It is typical of Aphrodisias, with its easily carved marble, that such ephemeral information was inscribed, rather than just painted or scribbled, so that here the information survives for us.

At a later period at least some of the backstage rooms were plastered; and at the north end of the stage that plaster survives. On one fragment, at the entry to the northernmost chamber, a text has been scratched: *Victory to the Greens and to the mimes of the Greens*.⁴⁸ The reference to the Greens is to one of the two factions, Green and Blue: these were organisations which provided originally the framework for the presentation of chariot racing — for which much of the material has been assembled by Alan Cameron.⁴⁹ As he demonstrated, during the 5th c. the activities of these organisations were extended to incorporate stage performers: one of the most important pieces of evidence for this development is the appearance of references to the factions at various cities — notably Aphrodisias — where there was no hippodrome for institutionalised and regular chariot racing, and where the factions must therefore have been solely concerned with mounting stage entertainments.

The evidence of this inscription is therefore evidence for that development; it also serves to emphasise the continuity in the kinds of entertainment presented in the theatre. This text, recording the activity of mime performers, must be dated, because of the reference to the Green faction, to the later 5th or 6th c. It is on plaster, and that plaster overlay one of the earlier group of inscriptions, reserving the room for a mime performer probably in the 3rd c. The theatre, therefore, continued to be used by similar performers for similar shows over several centuries. This must have tended to reinforce a feeling of continuity among the spectators, the inhabitants of Aphrodisias. It seems likely that they will have had a far stronger sense of that continuity than we do when we look at the physical remains.

The factions

The Green and Blue factions are widely attested at Aphrodisias, in inscriptions in the theatre and elsewhere on the site.⁵⁰ Although their primary function appears to have been to organise and underwrite the presentation of performances, they also had bodies of fans, and it is these supporters who have

47 H. Wiemken, *Der griechische Mimos* (Bremen 1972) 192-95.

48 ALA no.182, to be republished in Roueché (supra n.40) 1.1.III.

49 Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions* (Oxford 1976).

50 See ALA chapt.X; all of these texts will be published in Roueché (supra n.41).

attracted the attention of historians, largely because of their rowdy behaviour. Again, Aphrodisias is one of the sites which has provided important evidence for these groups.

The lower half of the *cavea* suffered badly in the mediaeval period, when houses were built all over the site of the theatre, and the seating blocks provided very useful building materials. Although the seating has been restored, it was impossible to discover the original position of many of the seats. What can be seen, however, is that the seats were extensively inscribed. It is clear that inscriptions were cut on top of one another, and they may be assumed to date from many periods; not surprisingly, the later ones are the easiest to decipher. Some of the seats had pictures scratched on them, such as the gladiator cited above. Others reserved seats for individuals. Several survive with the slogans of the supporters of the Blue or the Green factions. Most of these are slogans in favour of one group or the other: a striking variant is one, which proclaims 'Bad years for the Greens'. The phrase 'Bad years' was later erased, presumably by a supporter of the Greens.⁵¹

The function and significance of these groups has been widely — and sometimes wildly — discussed. What is most difficult to understand is how they seem at one and the same time to have fulfilled important ceremonial functions, and to have acted as disruptive hooligans. The evidence from Aphrodisias, found as it is in its original physical context, may help to resolve some of these issues. Firstly, the evidence for the physical and practical continuity of dramatic performances, illustrated by the performers' inscriptions, suggests that there may have been institutional continuity as well; the performers of the late-Roman period are likely to have inherited the organisational structures of earlier performers, who, grouped as the 'craftsmen of Dionysus', had for centuries been responsible for ensuring proper public expressions of reverence for the ruling powers. Many functions of the later 'factions' can be paralleled from those of the earlier organisations.⁵²

Secondly, as has been said, the theatre was a place both for entertainment and for political gatherings; and in the late empire, the distinction between the two kinds of gatherings became less and less solid. Libanius and other sources make it quite clear that one reason why the governors were so assiduous in ensuring the provision of public spectacles was in order to obtain popular applause, itself of increasing importance in their political careers; since 331, the acclamations of the provincial assembly, for or against governors, had regularly been reported to Constantinople.⁵³ Such an emphasis gave increasing importance to any organised groups in the auditorium. The evidence from the seats at Aphrodisias makes it clear that the groups of Blue and Green partisans were not the first groups to have gathered in the auditorium; instead, their inscriptions overlie those of earlier groupings — by neighbourhood, by trade, or even, in the case of the Jews, by religion. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the new loyalties, to Blue or Green, were adopted, not by single individuals, but by pre-existing groups, who had always sat together, and already had their own internal links and shared interests. The process by which these associations became grouped together, as partisans of one colour or another, was probably originally intended to ensure the proper performance of public acclamations; the result was to produce large groupings of people with various shared interests, and then to endow them with ever increasing political influence, as the provision of acclamations obtained greater authority.⁵⁴

This is only to summarise very briefly what I have set out in greater detail elsewhere. But this is a useful opportunity to point out the precise contribution of Aphrodisias to our understanding of these issues. The existence of large numbers of formal inscriptions at the site has given us a good idea of the vitality of festivals and contests in the city, and their continuation, in some form, and under the patronage of the governors, into the 5th and 6th c. What is particularly typical of Aphrodisias is the survival of so many informal inscriptions, found largely in their original context: it is the study of these which produces a clearer picture of the practical realities behind the political phenomena.

51 ALA no. 181.ii, to be republished in Roueché (supra n.41) 46.C.18.

52 Roueché *ibid.* chaps. 4 and 8.

53 See C. Roueché, *JRS* 74 (1984) 187-88.

54 Roueché (supra n.40) chaps 6-8.

The final phase

The presence of the faction texts indicates that the theatre remained in use probably well into the 6th c., thus confirming the evidence, mentioned above, of the inscription honouring the 6th-c. governor Vitianus. The evidence confirms that from other parts of the site — namely, that the late 5th and early 6th c. was a period of vigorous activity and development at Aphrodisias, and of an apparent reassertion of continuity with the past. And yet it precedes a momentous change.

At some time in the middle or late 6th c., the practice of putting up inscriptions — other than religious dedications or tombstones — virtually stopped at Aphrodisias, and they are no longer available as evidence. In the same century the stage buildings were decorated with the frescoes described below by Robin Cormack — although it is not clear whether this involved a change of use for the theatre. There is, however, one further piece of epigraphic activity which should perhaps be assigned to this period. At some time after the coming of Christianity, the name of Aphrodite was erased from the building inscriptions in the theatre (see J. M. Reynolds, above pp.22 ff., texts A.2, B.1 and C). This erasure cannot be dated with any certainty; there is evidence which suggests that some pagan terms were erased from inscriptions at Aphrodisias as early as the 4th c.⁵⁵ But the erasures in the theatre also include erasures on the Archive Wall; and here the terms erased are both the name of the goddess and also the term 'Aphrodisian'.⁵⁶ The fact that the ethnic is erased as well as the name of the goddess suggests very strongly that these erasures, at least, should be associated with the changing of the city's name from "Aphrodisias" to "Stauropolis", "City of the Cross". That change took place definitely after the Ecumenical Council of 553, when the bishop signed as bishop of Aphrodisias,⁵⁷ and almost certainly later than the composition of the History of John of Ephesus, who uses the old term, at some time in the 580's. The latest use of the name is apparently in the account of the miracles of John and Cyrus, written by Sophronius of Jerusalem at some time between 610 and 619, although that occurrence might more easily be an anachronism.⁵⁸ The name Stauropolis is first used in the Acts of the Ecumenical Council of 680.⁵⁹ This suggests that the Archive Wall — and perhaps the other inscriptions in the theatre — were still visible, and perceived as important, in the late 6th c. or even the early 7th. It seems likely that the theatre was not suddenly abandoned, but remained as an important public building where shows were presented, on a diminishing scale and increasingly infrequently, into the early 7th c.

But certainly, when, apparently in the early 7th c., the stage buildings collapsed (probably in an earthquake), the inhabitants of the city were unwilling, or unable, to restore the theatre as a place of entertainment. Instead, the fallen blocks were either left lying as they fell, to be discovered in place by the current excavators, or they were incorporated in a defence wall which was built across the back of the theatre buildings (figs.3-4). The hill against which the theatre had been built provided the most easily defensible point on the site; it was fortified and covered with later houses, with consequent damage, as has been described, to the fabric of the theatre.

The later history of the theatre, therefore, offers a striking example of continuity and of discontinuity. At the beginning of the 6th c. it was being used for entertainments of a kind which had been presented there for several centuries; only a century later it was being adapted as the core of a *castron*, a small Byzantine fort of the kind which was replacing cities all over Asia Minor. In this way, as in others, the developments at Aphrodisias mirror those at other cities in Asia Minor. But the remarkable state of preservation of the site, and especially the survival of so many legible inscriptions, makes the contribution of Aphrodisias to our understanding of this period exceptionally important.

⁵⁵ See ALA no.11, and commentary; on erasures at Aphrodisias see also C. P. Jones, *HSCP* 85 (1981) 107-29.

⁵⁶ *A&R* xv, documents 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 20.

⁵⁷ J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (1759-98) IX, 390.

⁵⁸ *Thaumata* (PG 87, 3379-3676; new edition by N. F. Marcos [Madrid 1975] chapt.10).

⁵⁹ Mansi (supra n.57) XI, 672; on this change, see also ALA pp. 148-51.



Fig.3. Byzantine defence wall across the east part of the theatre (photograph taken in 1978).



Fig.4. Defence wall of the theatre, partly dismantled (1976), showing Archive Wall.